

MISSOURI CONSERVATION SHOWCASE

Leon and Helen Kreisler Show How in the Show-Me State

Leon and Helen Kreisler were already successful ranchers back in 1991 when their desire to be even better led them to experiment with management intensive grazing. That experiment turned into a way of doing business that they are eager to share with all who will listen.



Leon and Helen Kreisler are eager to share what they have learned about management intensive grazing at their Missouri ranch.

The Kreislers started their operation near Salem, Missouri, in 1985 with 60 cows on 280 acres. After reading about management intensive grazing, they experimented with 22 acres in 1991.

“We were reaching near capacity on our farm, and we wanted to increase our herd but not put the money out for extra land,” Leon says. “My first system was really a poor boy operation, but I wanted to see how it would work.”

Later that year, Leon attended the first grazing school offered by the University of Missouri at its Linneus Research Center to learn more about setting up a permanent management intensive grazing system. The next year, he divided 69 acres into 15 paddocks. Today all 380 acres of grass at their 480-acre Oak Knoll Ranch is part of a management intensive grazing system.

Leon says the new system has been successful in meeting both of his original goals: increasing cow numbers without increasing acreage; and reducing fertilizer costs. Within four years of installing the system, the Kreislers increased their herd from 60 cows to 100 cows on the same acreage.

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"I figured if I only increased carrying capacity by 10 percent, it would be cheaper than buying additional land," Leon says. He says land was selling for about \$500 per acre when he developed the first 69 acres, and it would have cost \$1,500 per cow to expand his herd under the old system. Instead, he paid \$46 per acre to develop the management intensive grazing system. "I knew it would pay for itself," he says.



NRCS State Grassland Specialist Mark Kennedy, center, advises Leon and Helen Kriesler about the condition of plants in one of their paddocks.

Leon says he spends about the same amount on fertilizer with his 100-cow herd as he did for his 60-cow herd, thus reducing his fertilizer cost per cow.

With the first two goals met, Leon and Helen set newer goals: to continue to improve profitability; to improve animal and plant resources; and to upgrade existing fencing and water systems.

In addition to switching to fall calving, they stockpile and manage spring forage growth so they only feed hay 20-40 days per year. They also continue to diversify the forage base to support quail, turkey, songbirds and deer.

"There are many dedicated agricultural producers throughout Missouri who aspire to achieve what is best for their land, and at the same time, produce a solid economic footing for their farms. Leon and Helen Kriesler truly exemplify those who have successfully achieved this delicate balance," says Roger Hansen, state conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Fortunately for others, Leon and Helen Kriesler are anxious to share with others their knowledge, experience and future plans.

The Krieslers were participants in the Neighbor-to-Neighbor program from 1991-2006. The program allowed other farmers the opportunity to view and learn from the paddock design the Krieslers installed, as well as an opportunity to observe the watering systems and fencing.

The Krieslers actively participate as local Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) members, as NRCS Earth Team volunteers, as hosts for grazing schools and tours, and as leaders of the Advanced Graziers Group for the Top of the Ozarks RC&D Council. Leon has been a board member of the Missouri Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Committee since its inception in 1995. He provides valuable insight and direction to the committee, one of the most active in the United States. As one of six board members of the Missouri Soil and Water Conservation Districts Commission, Leon oversees Missouri's 114 soil and water conservation districts.



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Leon is former chair and current member of the University of Missouri's Wurdack Advisory Committee, two-time chair of the Missouri Beef Council, former state director of the Missouri Cattlemen's Association, and Missouri beef producers representative to the U.S. Meat Export Federation.

The Kreislers also have taken advantage of available assistance. They worked with the Dent County Soil and Water Conservation District and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources for cost-sharing on overseeding and fencing to exclude livestock from woodland. They partnered with the Farm Service Agency through the Emergency Conservation Program to install a waterline. They have worked with the State Extension Forester to get guidance on a red oak borer infestation in their area. And they have utilized NRCS and other partners to receive cost-sharing and other technical assistance to install a variety of conservation practices protect soil and water resources and to improve the quality of plant and animal health.

For example, the Kreislers installed seven fountain waterers, five tire tanks and two freezeproof concrete waterers to keep livestock from polluting water sources. They fenced woodlands to protect the woodland and to ensure that manure is deposited in pastures. To provide more wildlife habitat, the Kreislers diversified their forage base, installed bluebird and purple martin houses, and created brushpiles from their forest thinnings.

Leon Kreisler has received several awards over the years. He's been selected for the University of Missouri Extension Service's Leaders Honor Roll.

He's been the Missouri Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' Grassland Farmer of the Year. He's received the Missouri Grasslander Award from the Missouri Forage and Grassland Council. And he's received a certificate of merit from NRCS. And just recently, Leon and Helen were selected as regional winners of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association's Environmental Stewardship Award.

It started with the Kreislers' desire to be more profitable and to be true stewards of the land. That desire has benefited many with the good sense to let Leon and Helen show them what they have learned.

*Written by Charlie Rahm
NRCS, August 2007*

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Cattle in a paddock on Oak Knoll Ranch.

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